(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI H.R. BHARDWAJ): (a) to (d) According to article 130 of the Constitution, "the Supreme Court shall sit in Delhi or in such other place or places as the Chief Justice of India may, with the approval of the President, from time to time, appoint." However, the Chief Justice of India as well as the Full Court have been consistently opposed to the proposal for setting up of the Benches of the Supreme Court in other parts of the country. However, Advocates-on-Record or the petitioner-in-person can now file cases in the Supreme Court of India through internet.

Reduction in minimum age of marriage of men

396. SHRI SHANTARAM LAXMAN NAIK: Will the Minister of LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Law Commission has recommended reducing the minimum age for marriage of men from 21 to 18 years and declaring Union below the age of 16 years as void;

(b) the other prominent recommendations of the Commission with respect to children and matrimonial matters;

(c) whether Government has accepted the suggestions of the Commission; and

(d) if so, by when the required amendments to the concerned legislations are proposed to be introduced in Parliament?

THE MINISTER OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI H.R. BHARDWAJ): (a) Yes, Sir. The Law Commission of India in its 205th Report has recommended reducing the minimum age for marriage of men to 18 years and declaring marriage below the age of 16 years as void.

(b) The details of the recommendations are in Chapter VI of the 205th Report of the Law Commission, which is available on the Law Commission's Website.

(c) and (d) The matter is under consideration with the Government.

Equal status for all Election Commissioners

397. SHRI AMAR SINGH:
SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI:

Will the Minister of LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased to state:

(a) whether he has recently made a statement to the effect that Government was considering a proposal to give equal status to all the Election Commissioners;

(b) if so, the details of the proposal and the reasons therefor; and

(c) by when such a proposal is likely to be brought forward?

THE MINISTER OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI H.R. BHARDWAJ): (a) to (c) The proposal to give equal status to all Election Commissioners as available to the Chief Election Commissioner under clause (5) of article 324 of the Constitution is a part of the Electoral Reforms which is presently under consideration of the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice. The proposal

forwarded by the Election Commission in this regard is under consideration as part of the Electoral Reforms.

New mining policy

398. SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has decided to announce a new mining policy shortly;

(b) if so, the salient features thereof;

(c) whether the policy has been drafted keeping in view the outdated rules and corruption;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) by when the policy would be implemented?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF MINES (DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY): (a) to (e) A new mineral policy is under consideration of the Central Government.

Gold consumption

399. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the Minister of MINES be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the country is the largest consumer of gold;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the country imports 700—800 tonnes of gold every year;

(c) if so, the details of (a) and (b) above;

(d) whether as per the Indian Bureau of Metals (IBM), the country has 39 crore tonnes of gold reserves; and

(e) if so, what efforts Government is making to explore gold mines so as to reduce imports and thereby save lakhs of crores of rupees by Indians?

THE MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI SIS RAM OLA): (a) to (c) Yes, Sir. As per World Gold Council, India is the largest consumer of gold in the world. The import of gold in the last few years has been in the range of 700—800 tonnes per annum. Year wise import of gold, as informed by Director General of Foreign Trade, during last 3 years is as follows:—

2004-05	—	782.86 tonnes
2005-06	—	723.79 tonnes
2006-07	—	715.80 tonnes

(d) As per National Mineral Inventory prepared by Indian Bureau of Mines, the total resources of gold ore (primary) in the country are estimated at 390.29 million tonnes with a metal content of 490.81 tonnes.

(e) Apart from regional exploration of gold undertaken by Geological Survey of India (GSI), detailed exploration for gold in 39 prospects has been done by Mineral Exploration Corporation Limited (MECL) since its inception in 1972. Central Government has also been giving prior approvals for grant of reconnaissance permits for regional exploration and prospecting licenses for detailed exploration of gold to various applicants, including private companies.